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Chapter 33

UTAH WATER PROBLEM

THE PROBLEM

the white men first arrived on the sun-baked
of Utah, they knew nothing of the science of
The arid conditions of the Great West forced
ply water to the soil before they could plow and
r seeds. They came from a humid country
gation was not necessary; therefore, the water
at confronted them was twofold. They had to
to irrigate their crops and how to utilize the
ount of water to the best advantage of the
o were settling in Utah.

erous mountain streams flowed down through
is and out into the valleys during the spring
summer. These water-courses were the deter-
ctors in the location of the Utah settlements.
s of acres of good land lay in the confines of the
in most of which was completely incapable of
g human life had it not been for the high moun-
s serving as watersheds for the winter snow.
ount of water available was the most impor-
r in determining how much and which lands in
e farmed. Much fertile land remained uncult-
cause of insufficient moisture. The problem
onted the pioneers was not that of merely find-
o settle on. There was plenty of unoccupied
Utah. The problem was to find land to which
d be applied with a minimum of effort and cost.

BRIEF HISTORY OF IRRIGATION

the time of the coming of the Mormons to Utah
347, "there had been among Anglo-Saxon peo-
nificant experience with irrigation;" but it was
civilization. In fact, thousands of years ago
had been carried on in ancient Persia, Syria,

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Palestine, and the Mesopotamian countries. The Egyp-
tian records state that Menes, the first Egyptian king,
"extended greatly the irrigation structures of his day."
He lived 5,000 years ago. The monuments of Babylon
declare that in Abraham's time (2,000 B. C.) King Ham-
murabi "built a great and wonderful canal by which the
desert was made into gardens, and an elaborate system
of irrigation covered the Babylonian plain."

Irrigation on the American continent also goes back
further than historical records. Early in the sixteenth
century when the Spaniards first came to the New World,
they found the natives watering their lands. Some of the
canals which the Indians were using dated back to the
first tradition of the native population. In Peru, Chile,
and Argentina, remains of ancient irrigation structures
existed comparable with the best that we have today. In
fact, in some places stupendous irrigation canals may be
traced—400 to 500 miles long—far beyond our modern
attempts.

Seventy years before the English colony landed at
Jamestown, the Spanish missionaries gained a foothold
in the valley of the Rio Grande and continued the practice
of the natives of applying water to the soil. In the desert
wastes of North America, such as Arizona and New
Mexico, irrigation was also practiced by the modern suc-
cessors of the ancient Americans—the Indians, and the
Spanish settlers.

But we must go to the Salt Lake Valley of Utah for
the beginning of Anglo-Saxon irrigation in this country.
The Mormons were the first among the Anglo-Saxon
peoples to practice the art of irrigation on an extensive
scale. They dug numerous canals, brought thousands of
acres under cultivation, and developed permanent irriga-
tion on a community scale; therefore, the Mormon pio-
neers possess the honor of having founded modern irriga-
tion in America.

The founders of Utah had no preconceived ideas on
irrigation, but the system that they developed was the
natural result of trying to make a livelihood in a stubborn
environment.